

A SMALL INVESTMENT COULD'VE YIELDED BIG WIN FOR AGRICULTURE

8 May 2012 (Canberra) - The Government's 2012-13 Budget has missed a critical opportunity to boost Australian agriculture by overlooking investment in specialty crop production in Australia.

CropLife Australia Chief Executive Officer, Mr Matthew Cossey, said today that specialty crop producers often struggle to access appropriate pest management tools because the small volume of sales doesn't offset the high costs associated with registering specialty or minor uses for crop protection products. This is putting Australian agriculture at a serious disadvantage to our international competitors.

"A lack of registered pest management tools means that glass ceilings are placed on these potentially high profit crops. Specialty or minor use crops are typically fruit, vegetable or horticultural and are small on the global scale in comparison to broadacre varieties. The way to remove this 'glass ceiling' on specialty producers and deliver a bonus to the nation's farming sector is for the Australian Government to establish and fund a Specialty Crops Protection Program.

"The industry has been calling on the Australian Government for many years to provide seed funding for a Specialty Crops and Minor Use Program. This was highlighted as a critical component of the 'Better Regulation' reform program in CropLife's budget submission this year. Failure to implement such a program will continue to impede Australian agriculture and our crop export opportunities.

"Similar programs in the US and Canada receive millions of dollars in government funding because they deliver such significant economic returns, while Australian farmers looking to open up new commercial crop opportunities are left to navigate the complex maze of regulation in this area without assistance." Mr Cossey said.

"The Federal Coalition promised to fund an 'Australian Specialty Crops Protection Unit' as part of its 2007 election commitment, but to date the current government has not publically supported or looked to implement this important investment for Australia's future farming growth.

"This is an initiative that should have bipartisan support in Australia. An analysis of the US specialty crops program showed that every dollar spent by government in assisting specialty growers in the US returned more than five hundred dollars to the economy. That benefit was spread throughout the entire community and includes cheaper fruits and vegetables. That is a big economic and trade bang for small bucks.

"The Australian Government and states are currently trying to harmonise their post-sale regulations for crop protectants and a key issue revolves around the access of specialty crop producers to crop protection tools. It would be a shame if the government's other work in agriculture was undermined by an issue that could be solved with a little bit of vision and even less money. I am confident Minister Ludwig recognises the benefits that a minor-use program would have for Australian agriculture. I am hopeful and confident that industry and the Government can work constructively to deliver this important initiative," concluded Mr Cossey.

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About CropLife Australia

CropLife Australia (CropLife) is the peak industry organisation representing the agricultural chemical and biotechnology (plant science) sector in Australia. CropLife represents the innovators, developers, manufacturers and formulators of crop protection and agricultural biotechnology products. The plant science industry provides products to protect crops against pests, weeds and diseases, as well as developing crop biotechnologies that are key to the nation's agricultural productivity, sustainability and food security. The plant science industry is worth more than \$1.5 billion a year to the Australian economy and directly employs thousands of people across the country.

CropLife and its members are committed to the stewardship of their products throughout their lifecycle and to ensuring that human health, environment and trade issues associated with agricultural chemical use in Australia are responsibly and sustainably managed. Our member companies spend more than \$13 million a year on stewardship activities to ensure the safe and effective use of their products. CropLife ensures the responsible use of these products through its mandatory industry code of conduct and has set a benchmark for industry stewardship through programs such as drumMUSTER, ChemClea® and Agsafe Accreditation and Training. Our stewardship activities demonstrate our commitment to managing the impacts associated with container waste and unwanted chemicals.

